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Towards a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East

Summary of a United Nations Study

United Nations

Preface

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Towards a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East

Summary of a United Nations Study

Background

The item entitled "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East" was first included in the agenda of the General Assembly in 1974, at the request of Iran, later joined by Egypt. Every year since then, the General Assembly has adopted a resolution on the subject-matter which, as of 1980, has been adopted without a vote. Resolution 43/65 of 7 December 1988, which requested this study, was put forward by Egypt in order to give further impetus to the realization of the objective of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

By that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to undertake a study on effective and verifiable measures which would facilitate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, taking into account the circumstances and characteristics of the Middle East, as well as the views and the suggestions of the parties of the region, and to submit this study to the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session. To assist him in carrying out this mandate, the Secretary-General

appointed, in their personal capacities, three consultant experts: Ambassador James Leonard (United States of America), Dr. Jan Prawitz (Sweden) and Mr. Benjamin Sanders (Netherlands).

The study was carried out between July 1989 and August 1990. In the course of their work, the experts undertook numerous contacts and consultations with officials of States concerned, both at the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Visits to the region were carried out for consultations with government officials of a number of States, as well as with several research establishments dealing with issues of relevance to the study. Consultations with IAEA officials were also undertaken throughout the various stages of the study.

In transmitting the unanimous report of the experts to the General Assembly (A/45/435), the Secretary-General noted that the study discussed a number of steps and measures that could ease the process leading to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Those measures, he added, could be undertaken independently or in conjunction with each other, as well as by individual States or jointly by several, and also on a reciprocal basis; each of them would move the States concerned closer to their ultimate objective – the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons.

The concept of nuclear-weapon-free zones

Geographical, political and other circumstances make each nuclear-weapon-free zone different from any other. Nevertheless, the term nuclear-weapon-free zone usually

implies the fulfilment of certain common objectives and the implementation of certain elements of arms limitation. Thus, the primary objectives in establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone are to bar the presence of nuclear weapons in the zonal area and to reduce the risk of its being involved in a nuclear war.

For the achievement of the objectives of a nuclear-weapon-free zone, three measures are of central importance: the *non-possession* of nuclear weapons by zonal States, the *non-stationing* of nuclear weapons within the geographical area of the zone by any State and the *non-use* or *non-threat of use* of nuclear weapons against targets within the zone, this last objective requiring a commitment by nuclear-weapon States.

In 1975, the General Assembly, in its resolution 3472 B (XXX), defined the concept of a nuclear-weapon-free zone as follows:

> "A nuclear-weapon-free zone shall, as a general rule, be deemed to be any zone, recognized as such by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which any group of States, in the free exercise of their sovereignty, has established by virtue of a treaty or convention whereby: (a) the statute of total absence of nuclear weapons to which the zone shall be subject, including the procedures for the delimitation of the zone, is defined; and (b) an international system of verification and control is established to guarantee compliance with the obligations deriving from that statute."

No precise requirements can be set as regards the suitable size of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Sometimes a zone may be initially established in a more limited area and later be extended as other countries agree to join in. Normally, a zone would comprise the national territories (waters and airspace included) of two or more neighbouring States.

A further element which could be useful in a zone arrangement is "thinning out", that is, withdrawal of, or other measures regarding nuclear weapons, military forces or military activities in land and sea areas adjacent to the zone. The purpose of "thinning out" is to enhance the security of zonal States and the credibility of the assurances extended to the zone by extra-zonal States.

The study also notes that the effective implementation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone agreement requires a system of verification to ensure that all States involved, zonal States as well as extra-zonal States, comply with their respective obligations. The precise nature, scope and modalities of the system would vary from zone to zone and depend upon the nature of obligations undertaken. Most verification related to peaceful nuclear activities of zonal States could be entrusted to IAEA. Nevertheless, in some cases, for example in regions where sharp conflicts exist, entrusting the task of verification to an international organization, supplemented by bilateral arrangements, might be preferred. The possibility is also discussed that a zone agreement might provide for any party to undertake verification activities, including on-site inspection, in another zonal State. Mutual verification systems of this obligatory nature could be of particular

relevance for States, such as Israel, which might often find themselves outvoted within international arrangements where decisions are taken by a majority vote.

A nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East

Geographical delimitation of the zone

The geographical limits of a nuclear-weapon-free zone should normally be established by the agreement of the States concerned. Thus, notes the report, a discussion of the limits of a Middle East zone can only be preliminary and, in a sense, hypothetical.

An analysis of the region in terms of "core countries" and "peripheral countries" is suggested. Such an analysis should take account of geography, of existing tensions, and of the potential of particular States to develop nuclear weapons. A recent study by IAEA (IAEA-GC XXXIII/887), took the region of the Middle East as including the area extending from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in the West to the Islamic Republic of Iran in the East, and from the Syrian Arab Republic in the North to Yemen in the South. (See map at end of booklet.)

This "IAEA definition" of the zone may provide a working list of core countries, although any potential zonal State would have the right to put forward its own list of minimum essential parties in such an undertaking. A zone can thus be developed in stages, beginning with the core countries and later extended to include additional States.

The report further points out that several sea areas may be considered for either inclusion or "thinning-out" measures since the prospective zonal areas have coasts in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the north-western Indian Ocean. In addition, since a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone would have neighbours around almost its entire periphery and its prospective core zone would border both the Soviet Union and NATO territory, it is suggested that "thinning-out" measures related to nuclear weapons deployed in land areas adjacent to the zone might also be considered.

The present situation

The report notes that, of the prospective parties to the zone, particularly the core group, all of the Arab States from Iraq to Mauritania, and also Iran are, with four exceptions, parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The exceptions are Algeria, Mauritania, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Israel also is not an NPT party.

Three Arab countries parties to the NPT, Egypt, Iraq and Libya, have research reactors which are all subject to safeguards agreements with IAEA. Iran's research reactor is also under IAEA safeguards. Algeria, though not a party to the NPT, has placed its research reactor under IAEA safeguards. The other two Arab States non-parties to the NPT – Oman and the United Arab Emirates – have no nuclear facilities that require international safeguarding.

Israel has two reactors. Its 5-MW IRR-1 reactor at Nahal-Soreq is under IAEA safeguards, but its IRR-2 reactor at Dimona is not. It is the Dimona reactor and associated facilities that are commonly pointed to as the possible source of an Israeli nuclear-weapon capability.

To establish an effective nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East it would be essential to place all nuclear facilities under appropriate international safeguards, either through adherence of the State in question to the NPT or conclusion of a full-scope safeguards agreement with IAEA. For practical purposes this requirement is of relevance to Israel only, since all other prospective participants in the zone with nuclear facilities have placed these facilities under IAEA safeguards.

Since all States in the area have declared themselves in favour of a Middle East nuclear-weapon-free zone, the questions to be addressed are how, through what process, and under what conditions a zone might be established. According to the report, for the Arab Governments and Iran, the problem is simple: the difficulty lies in Israeli policies, and the proper step for Israel to take is to join the NPT and negotiate with IAEA the application of safeguards on its nuclear installations or, short of joining the NPT, to accept full-scope safeguards on all of its installations. For Israel the problem is equally simple: the difficulty lies in the unwillingness of other States in the region, except Egypt, to accept Israel as a legitimate State, and the proper step for them to take would be to sit down at a formal negotiating table with Israel and work out the arrangements for creating the zone.

For third-party observers, some scepticism is justified as to whether the matter is as simple as either side asserts. If the Israeli Government were to accept the Arab demand for safeguards on its Dimona reactor, then the installation could no longer be used – assuming that in fact it has been – for the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes. However, safeguards on Dimona would do nothing to neutralize whatever stockpile of weapons-grade material might have been accumulated and, thus, additional measures would be needed in order to address that problem.

Nevertheless, notes the report, given the present intense mistrust which exists between Israel and most States in the area, it is difficult to imagine either (a) an Israeli Government making an immediate, full disclosure of weapon-related material or (b) a general acceptance of the completeness of whatever declaration Israel might make.

On the other hand, Arab willingness to sit at the table with the Government of Israel would signal an extremely important moderation in past attitudes. Nevertheless, it seems extremely doubtful that in itself this improvement would appear to the Israeli Government to be sufficiently profound and irreversible to justify a profound and irreversible alteration in its defence posture.

Creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is thus not simply a matter of finding some clever diplomatic formula that overcomes or circumvents the deadlock in the official Israeli and Arab positions. Only a series of steps that reduce tensions drastically can bring the parties to a serious negotiation. Even then it would not

be expected that the negotiations would be quick and easy or that the zone, when agreed, can be fully realized without an extended transition.

Relationship between the nuclear factor and other military and security factors

Various factors will influence a State's decision as to whether or not to associate itself with a nuclear-weapon-free zone. It is assumed that States will participate in a nuclear-weapon-free zone only if doing so would enhance their national security or, inversely, that refraining from doing so would impair that security. This assumption applies in the Middle East as much as anywhere else.

In terms of armed forces, Israel has long been a militarily significant nation in the Middle East region. Although its stock of equipment may no longer be as large in relation to that of its potential opponents as it once was, well-informed sources regard its army and air force as still particularly well equipped, staffed and trained. While other Middle Eastern States have also been receiving high-quality military equipment from various sources, including some traditionally well-disposed toward Israel, the latter has increasingly supplemented its external purchases with domestically manufactured weaponry ranging from small arms to medium-range ballistic missiles. It has also made technical improvements to imported equipment.

Nevertheless, the report notes, there are indications that Israel's relative conventional strength may be diminishing. In this connection, one factor that should be pointed out is the acquisition by potential opponents of ballistic missiles with a relatively

long range and high accuracy. This gives those States a means of striking at a longer distance and enables them to participate in a conflict, even if their territory does not directly abut on the opponent's.

Against this background, Israel's security position is characterized by three features which necessarily play a part in determining its attitude towards the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone: the relatively small size of its territory; the sustained hostility between itself and the great majority of States of the region; and the fact that it has no military allies in the region and that the one State which might support it in a conflict is geographically remote.

The study points out that little is known about Israel's nuclear policy beyond its repeated statement that it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. However, the 1981 United Nations *Study on Israeli Nuclear Armament* states that a survey of the official and unofficial statements of Israeli policy-makers on Israel's nuclear policy would indicate that Israel's "nuclear posture" fits either of two policy options, described as follows:

> "... it may acquire [nuclear] weapons and deny that it possesses them; or it may acquire a nuclear-weapon potential just short of the actual possession of nuclear weapons and maintain a posture of ambiguity."

Either way, it would seem that the actual or potential possession of nuclear weapons plays an important part in Israel's security policy, as a deterrent or as a weapon of last resort – or a combination of both. One may assume that it is not envisaged as a realistic war-fighting option in a non-terminal conflict, given – among other things – the possibility that the use of nuclear weapons would meet with retaliation with remotely delivered chemical warfare agents. Moreover, any use of nuclear weapons against close-in military opponents in the restricted theatre of operations involved would also tend to impair the user's own operations and would risk the gravest consequences for its civilian population. In fact, in the Middle East as a whole, it does not appear that the use of nuclear weapons could achieve any rational military or political objective.

These developments indicate that in any future widespread or prolonged conflict Israel would have greater problems than before. It is most unlikely that Israel will give up the security it believes it now derives from its nuclear ambiguity, its presumed deterrent and its eventual weapon of last resort, without a much higher degree of assurance that such a conflict will not occur, as well as compensation in terms of arrangements to enhance regional security in all of its multiple and complex dimensions, conventional as well as chemical and nuclear, political as well as military.

Measures facilitating the establishment of a zone

A nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East could be, as the study suggests, a new factor that sets the region on a firm course away from proliferation and constantly

heightening insecurity. The problem is how to create the conditions in which a zone becomes a realistic development. Confidence must be built on all sides: confidence that declarations of a desire for a just and lasting peace are not merely a smokescreen; confidence that military solutions to political problems are excluded; confidence that military postures that are perceived as threatening can be avoided or adjusted. Renunciation of hostile acts and of threatening, inflammatory declarations would do much to increase confidence as well. Most important of all, there must be progress in solving the fundamental conflicts in the region. Without such progress, technical measures in the nuclear area or on other security problems will hardly be given serious thought, much less developed to provide a meaningful barrier to tension and even war.

The study discusses a number of suggestions for steps that could be taken by one, several, or all of the States in the region to build mutual confidence and thus facilitate the realization of a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Most of the measures are in the nuclear field. Others do not directly involve nuclear matters but do bear on the security of States and provide opportunities for building confidence.

Confidence-building in the nuclear field

In discussing possible confidence-building measures, particularly in the nuclear field, the report notes that such undertakings by the States in the region may not always involve symmetrical actions in view of their different positions regarding the NPT and the safeguarding of their nuclear facilities.

For non-parties to the NPT, which in practical terms means Israel, the most significant confidence-building measure available would be to place all of its nuclear facilities under safeguards. The principal installation not safeguarded is that at Dimona. Clearly, there can be no nuclear-weapon-free zone in the area until this has been done. The Israeli Government's endorsement of the establishment of a zone thus entails an eventual willingness to place the Dimona reactor under safeguards (or to close it down, a less likely alternative).

Safeguarding or closing Dimona would not in itself eliminate any nuclear weapons or weapons material that Israel might have. The eventual application of safeguards to Dimona would certainly bring an end to any production of plutonium for weapons, but it would not impose control on whatever plutonium may already have been produced. What safeguards on Dimona would do is place an upper limit on the amount of weapons material in Israel's possession. For this reason, it may be useful to think of safeguarding Dimona as a half-way point on Israel's road to a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In this connection, the study further notes the fact that Israel is assumed to have a substantial quantity of unsafeguarded plutonium. That would require the development of verification measures extending well beyond the facilities safeguards that IAEA has in operation for present NPT parties and would be necessary in order for the zone to be established effectively.

For parties to the NPT, unilateral declarations of their nuclear activities that are not covered by safeguards, such as uranium mining or processing, heavy water or

tritium production or stockpiling, will underline their commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Such declarations could be a useful supplement to those made to IAEA in accordance with safeguards agreements. Confidence in these declarations could be built by an informal system of inspections by invitation from the Government concerned to, for instance, IAEA.

In addition, NPT parties could build further confidence by unilateral declarations in which they would set explicit, longer limits for themselves on the right of withdrawal contained in article X, paragraph 1, of the Treaty (the Treaty requires parties to give notice three months in advance of withdrawal). That would allow a longer breathing space for diplomacy to try to cure whatever "extraordinary event" was threatening the Treaty.

The study suggests still other measures which could reinforce IAEA safeguards for those countries which have or will have research or power reactors. One would be a public commitment to refrain from any domestic reprocessing of reactor fuel, even on an experimental basis. Arrangements regarding the handling and storage of spent fuel and the processing of waste, preferably the shipment of the spent fuel back to an outside source or to a specially established international fuel cycle facility, would discourage suspicions and rumours. Countries planning the construction of reactors could avoid designs which would use highly enriched uranium. States having such uranium could arrange to return it to its supplier against an equivalent amount of lower-enriched uranium.

With regard to all activities in the nuclear field, a maximum degree of openness and transparency will be greatly in the interest of the country concerned. The simple publication of an annual report and its filing with IAEA would be helpful. Invitations to foreign scholars to visit, and even to reside and conduct research, would also be useful.

A regional commitment not to test a nuclear device would be another highly useful partial measure looking towards a nuclear-weapon-free zone. An explicit commitment by Israel not to test would give more precise substance to its promise not to be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the area. Similarly, an additional commitment by NPT parties not to test would reinforce their non-nuclear status. Any such commitment should be phrased in absolutely unambiguous terms and refer to "any nuclear explosive device of any type". One way of making the commitment would be through formal letters to the Secretary-General.

Security assurances

The report notes that progress towards the realization of a nuclear-weapon-free zone will require support from the major outside Powers. Indeed, the entire international community will have to contribute in important ways if threats to peace are to be brought under control and eventually eliminated. The major outside nuclear Powers, particularly the Soviet Union and the United States, can help to invigorate the process by the posture they adopt on the matter of security assurances. The willingness to provide assurances,

even in advance of the creation of a zone, could give States in the region the necessary encouragement to face the risks a zone will inevitably entail.

Negative security assurances specifically formulated for the Middle East region will be needed as the nuclear-weapon-free zone moves closer to crystallization. The States of the region participating in the zone will expect to receive categorical commitments from the nuclear-weapon States not to threaten or attack them with nuclear weapons. Another form of negative assurance that a Middle East zone can be expected to elicit is a commitment not to station nuclear weapons in the treaty area. This could be politically a more meaningful commitment than the "not to attack..." assurance, desirable though that is.

Positive assurances are, by nature, more difficult. From the point of view of the State expected to give them, they involve commitments to assist a State that is in danger in circumstances which cannot be clearly specified or foreseen. On the other hand, positive assurances are not unambiguously advantageous from the viewpoint of the State receiving them. As regards Middle Eastern States though, this concern is not frequently manifested by officials and, on balance, positive assurances appear to be strongly desired, rather than feared. For instance, officials of virtually every Government in the region regard Security Council resolution 255 (1968) (on security assurances in connection with the non-proliferation Treaty) as too limited, although there is no consensus on how it should or could be specifically strengthened in

connection with a Middle East zone. (For an explanation of "negative" and "positive" assurances see *Note* at end.)

Steps by outside Powers to encourage a zone

The first duty of outside Powers that want to encourage the elimination of nuclear dangers from the area is, according to the report, to make their position clear. They should plainly state, for example, that they strongly oppose any development, such as a nuclear test or an attempt to circumvent the NPT, which would move the area in the wrong direction and would damage the process leading to a zone. They should also come forward with proposals for concrete measures for reducing tensions, building confidence, and gaining control over the various arms races in the area.

The leading industrial States have a significant role to play with regard to the export of technology which has military applications and of weapons, particularly nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The report points out, however, that efforts regarding control of technology tend to be perceived by the developing countries, those in the Middle East included, as designed to keep developing countries in a state of technological backwardness and military inferiority. Thus, an effort should be made to co-operate with Middle Eastern countries so as to counter that perception.

Support and co-operation could be offered, for example, to regional space programmes in exchange for minimizing any spillover from such programmes into military activities. Something similar might also be done in the area of chemicals.

Co-operation in peaceful nuclear programmes would have even greater symbolic and political value, particularly if it is done at a multilateral or regional level. For example, the provision of international facilities for nuclear waste disposal would help to ensure against diversion to military purposes. The report also refers to the 1990 proposal by President Mubarak of Egypt for the creation of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East as providing an opportunity to supplier groups to align themselves with a regional initiative.

Confidence-building in other military fields

The close relationship – the "linkage" – among all the elements which affect security is well known. The problem is much too complex and unyielding for any comprehensive settlement to solve all at once. Yet all the separate elements must be worked on concurrently, for it will not be possible to settle any one piece of the problem unless it is clear that progress is being made on the other pieces as well. A radical transformation must be effected in the military and political relationships of the entire area of the Middle East, if it is to become and remain truly nuclear-free.

In this connection, the report notes that technical military confidence-building measures can be of great assistance in developing mutual confidence and in averting unintended deteriorations, as they provide transparency and thereby predictability. They serve to prevent surprise attack and to assure a potential adversary that one's forces and dispositions are not of an offensive character. Military confidence-

building measures cannot, however, take the place of a political process; they should be developed and installed in parallel with the political track, not as a substitute for it. Although it was beyond the scope of the study to develop any such comprehensive programme of measures, the report does suggest certain near-term steps which could be helpful, particularly in regard to weapons of mass destruction.

The linkage between nuclear and chemical weapons – or more precisely among all weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical, biological and their means of delivery, especially long-range missiles – has been asserted by leaders and by commentators throughout the Middle East and elsewhere. The relationship is complex and is frequently misunderstood or misstated. Some see chemical weapons as a deterrent or a possible response to the threat or use of nuclear weapons – the "poor man's bomb". Others see nuclear weapons as a deterrent or response to the threat or use of chemical weapons, as well as a general weapon of last resort. Missiles are usually seen as the "normal" or "preferred" means of delivery of mass destruction warheads.

The report cautions that it is not useful to dispute the interrelated, "linked" character of these weapons. Nor can it be disputed that they all have a relationship to conventional forces. What must be borne in mind is that the argument that nothing can be done about chemical weapons unless nuclear weapons are eliminated, and the argument that nothing can be done to make the region nuclear-free until chemical weapons have been eliminated, are both obstacles to progress. What must be recognized is that whatever successes are achieved in limiting or banning any one of

the four elements of mass destruction weapons, they will be fragile and ultimately reversible unless progress is made on all the others as well as on conventional weapons and political problems.

The study suggests that one of the measures which would be useful in this process would be for all States in the Middle East to become parties to the 1972 biological weapons Convention. Furthermore, confidence-building in the area of chemical weapons is of fundamental importance. Middle Eastern States should contribute actively to the Conference on Disarmament negotiations on a chemical weapons convention, making it clear that when a satisfactory text has been developed they will promptly join the treaty and support universal adherence to it.

The problem of delivery systems for weapons of mass destruction, both chemical and nuclear, though complex and difficult, may also offer opportunities for confidence-building even in the very near term. Medium- or longer-range missiles are destabilizing weapons and, thus, as a starting-point for discussions, it would be desirable to consider a complete suspension by all States in the region of domestic production and imports of missiles beyond a certain range.

A missile freeze could be strengthened by suspending any further missile flight tests, though such a ban probably could not be absolute. Several Governments have or plan to have space programmes and much of the technology for space launches and military missiles overlaps. Nevertheless, space programmes would have to be conducted in an open, transparent manner. Further to a missile freeze, says the report,

it would be helpful if deployment constraints could be developed for aircraft capable of carrying chemical or nuclear bombs. In addition, a Middle Eastern version of what is known as "Open Skies" could make a worthwhile contribution to transparency.

Conclusions

This study of the path to a nuclear-weapon-free zone for the Middle East has been made in a spirit of "realistic optimism". There clearly is no instant solution to the problem. There also is no doubt that the goal can be reached; it is not an idle dream. Intensive and sustained efforts can overcome the most serious difficulties, provided that these efforts attract the participation and support of the States of the region and of the major outside Powers. In the end, the co-operation of the international community as a whole will be essential. This consideration alone points to a central role for the United Nations.

The effort required will be great, but so will the benefits of success. The nuclear threat can be effectively and permanently eliminated only as a pattern of sound regional security relationships is developed based on unequivocal, unambiguous, legally binding arrangements, amongst which must be an equal commitment by all States of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East to relinquish the nuclear-weapon option. That pattern will have to be radically different from the dangerous and unstable relationships which exist today, with sophisticated weapons proliferating, including weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and with political tensions remaining unresolved.

Chapter IV of the study lists a number of measures to build mutual confidence and prepare the way for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone. They are not arranged in order of priority or importance; indeed some could also be elements in a final agreement setting up the zone. (These latter are summarized in the annex to the study.) Some of these measures can be implemented unilaterally by States of the region or outside it. Others may require agreement among groups of States. When it will become possible, at some point, to arrange a negotiating conference involving all the core States in the region, together with some outside States, a major breakthrough in confidence-building will have occurred.

To get the process moving forward, various Governments can unilaterally or jointly initiate action on the measures they consider most useful, even without waiting for all potential participants to join. This applies particularly to the principal outside States, which may have greater freedom of action than States in the region.

It is especially important that confidence-building measures be developed in the nuclear field, since such measures will demonstrate a conviction that the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free zone is really attainable and that it is truly preferred over the only imaginable alternative: a region with multiple nuclear Powers in which "peace" is maintained by the fear of mutual devastation.

The single measure immediately available for giving momentum to the process aimed at the establishment of a zone is a regional understanding that there will be no test explosion of a nuclear device, nor any moves towards such a test. Israel, which

is not a party to the NPT, has said it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the region. It has not, however, stated clearly whether it considers that this commitment bars a nuclear test. Parties to the NPT are barred from actually conducting such a test, or from accumulating the unsafeguarded fissionable material required for testing a nuclear device. However, they are not barred from other actions which would be required in preparing for one. Clarifying these ambiguities would be a substantial first step on the road to a zone.

Adherence to the NPT by all States of the region – and notably by Israel – would be a most significant milestone. Pending such a measure, the acceptance by Israel of safeguards on the Dimona facilities would be an important move towards the establishment of a zone and could be realized well in advance of its adherence to the NPT.

The application of safeguards to Dimona will equate to the acceptance by Israel of an effective upper limit to whatever stock of plutonium it may have accumulated from the operations there, but will not necessarily entail the placing of safeguards on that stockpile.

NPT parties with relatively advanced nuclear programmes, involving, for example, the construction of research or power reactors, can arrange those programmes to minimize suspicions that they might also serve a military objective. The programmes can avoid any use of weapon-grade fissionable material and they can invite inspection

of any facilities which use significant quantities of nuclear material. Stocks of natural uranium, heavy water and tritium can be declared.

The final step to the establishment of a zone will be taken when all States of the area can credibly declare that they have no unsafeguarded fissionable material nor unsafeguarded facilities that could produce it. This situation would need a substantially expanded system of verification which could be installed either as an extension of the present IAEA safeguards system or as a combination of safeguards and other verification arrangements of a multilateral or bilateral character.

There is one important measure which could be taken by the States of the region at any time during the process outlined above leading to the zone: that is the development of a categorical understanding that there will be no attacks on nuclear installations.

The area of security assurances is one in which the nuclear-weapon States can make major contributions, not only when the zone itself finally takes shape but even much earlier. It appears likely that the nuclear-weapon States will agree to "negative" assurances: commitments not to threaten or attack the States of the zone with nuclear weapons. The same applies to commitments not to station nuclear weapons anywhere in the zone.

The question of positive assurances – commitments to assist a nation which has been threatened or attacked – may be more complicated. Assurances going beyond Security Council resolution 255 (1968) are widely desired, but the possible content of

such assurances is nowhere clearly defined. In discussing a nuclear-weapon-free zone, one thinks first of nuclear threats, but it seems doubtful that security assurances can or should be restricted to the nuclear dimension. No one wishes to appear to give a green light to aggression which threatens to use "only" conventional weapons. An active role for the permanent members of the Security Council in developing solutions to this broad and complex problem appears essential.

The role of the major outside Powers and others in encouraging the realization of a nuclear-weapon-free zone goes beyond the problem of security assurances. Unless they put their weight and their diplomatic skills unreservedly to the task, it is not likely that it will be accomplished. A balanced and comprehensive plan for their action is required.

The leading industrial States must also continue and even expand their activities designed to discourage any proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. These activities should, moreover, be extended to enlist the co-operation of Middle Eastern States, perhaps through the Mubarak Plan. The struggle against proliferation is in the interest of all, but the industrial countries should take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that this effort does not prevent any country from developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

There are a number of other confidence-building measures that may be appropriate to Middle Eastern circumstances. Such measures, including a number that have been discussed but not yet adopted in Europe, offer an extensive à la carte menu

from which selections can be made. These include limitations on forces and deployments, notifications of manoeuvres, and the like.

Still other measures have particular significance for the Middle East such as adherence by all States in the area to the biological weapons Convention, as well as the chemical weapons convention as soon as its negotiation is completed in the Conference on Disarmament. A freeze on missiles (beyond a certain range) should be pursued as a matter of great urgency. Furthermore, the Security Council should examine measures to enhance the effectiveness of its efforts to intercept the development of dangerous situations at the earliest possible stage.

The presence of nuclear weapons throughout the Middle East is in no sense inevitable. They do not result from uncontrollable natural processes. They do not emerge by themselves, like some poisonous fungus, from dark caves deep in the earth. They were invented by human beings and, even though humans cannot "uninvent" them, they can freely decide not to make them. But this decision not to make them will have to be affirmed and reaffirmed again and again by the Governments and peoples of the region. A nuclear-weapon-free zone can be the effective framework within which that decision is formulated, carried out, and sustained.

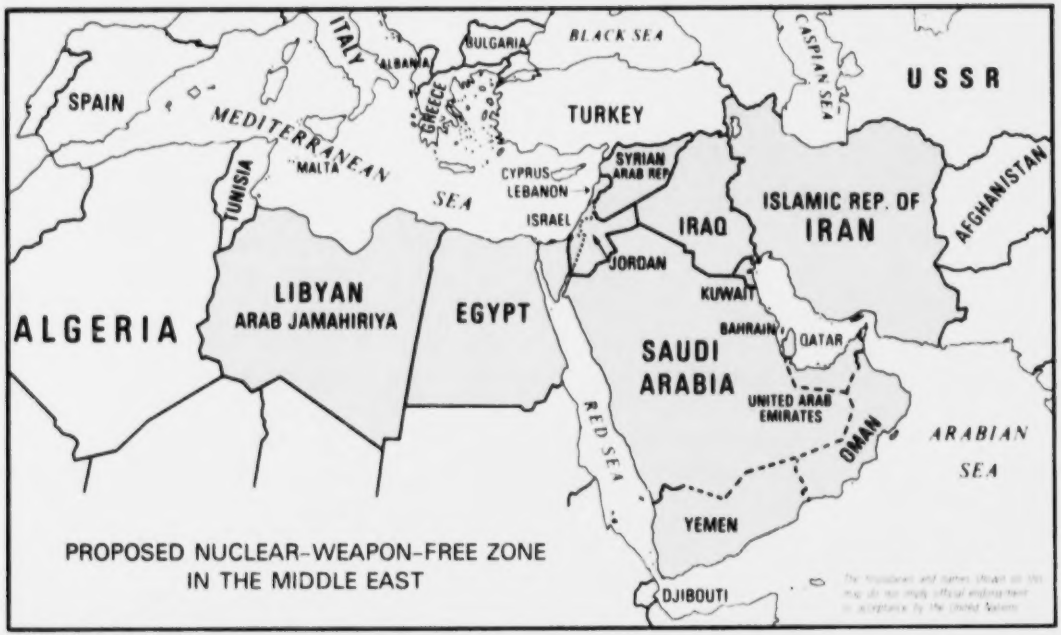
Action by the General Assembly 1990

On 4 December 1990, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 45/52, entitled "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East". In the

resolution, the General Assembly, among other provisions, welcomed the completion of the study undertaken by the Secretary-General; requested all parties of the region and other parties concerned, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to submit to the Secretary-General their views and suggestions with respect to the study, as well as on follow-up measures which would facilitate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East; and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session, in 1991, a report on the implementation of that resolution.

Note

Under a "positive" assurance, nuclear-weapon States would commit themselves, in specific circumstances, to come to the defence of non-nuclear-weapon States, as envisaged, for example, in Security Council resolution 255 (1968). Under a "negative" assurance, nuclear Powers would commit themselves not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.



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